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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BOGOTA 005458

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER ETRD ELAB CO VE

SUBJECT: THE STATE OF COLOMBIA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

REF: A. BOGOTA 4729 (NOTAL)

¶B. BOGOTA 4565 (NOTAL)

Classified By: CDA Milton K. Drucker, Reasons: 1.4 B & D.

¶1. (C) Summary: While the leftist Polo Party's Carlos Gaviria attained some 22 percent of the vote in the May 28 Presidential election (up from its ten percent total in March Congressional contests), much of his vote was a protest against Uribe and not necessarily an endorsement of the Polo.

The Polo continues to face internal discord and lack of cohesion, with three major camps appearing to vie for control. At present, only Gaviria himself and the leader of the Polo's most moderate group, Bogota Mayor Luis Eduardo Garzon, are potentially viable Presidential aspirants in ¶2010. Garzon maintains an ambivalent relationship with much of the Polo, which is dominated internally by actors sitting far to his left. While some radical leftist actors garner attention from the media, none are yet poised to make a serious run at the Presidency. End Summary.

THE PANORAMA

¶2. (C) The Colombian public consistently repudiates the FARC and ELN and continues to support Uribe's democratic security policy, as ratified by Uribe's overwhelming reelection on May 28 (Ref A). While Gaviria attained 22 percent of the vote in the election, our estimation is a sizable number of his votes were votes against Uribe rather than expressions of support for the Polo. Given overall disenchantment with the other major rival to Uribe, the Liberal Party's Horacio Serpa (who finished with 11 percent), anti-Uribe Colombians tended to vote for Gaviria.

¶3. (C) In spite of stumbling blocks of late, public support for the FTA continues to stand around 50 percent or slightly higher. While support for extradition of drug traffickers to the U.S. slipped slightly in a recent poll, according to Gallup surveys over the last year, public support for extradition has hovered just over 45 percent on average. For most of the first Uribe Administration, public security was the top concern of most Colombians. However, in recent months, economic issues have displaced security concerns in most polls. Colombians historically have also gravitated toward the center.

PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN RHETORIC: MILD

¶4. (C) Gaviria and Serpa took up traditional leftist themes

in the Presidential campaign, such as close ties to/dependence on the U.S., opposition to free trade, and lack of disposition to negotiate with the FARC. The left's criticism of Uribe's policies largely fell on deaf ears, however, as the Colombian public overwhelmingly supports Plan Colombia (including, but to a somewhat lesser extent, the prospective FTA) and continues to support military engagement of the FARC and ELN. Within the hemisphere, Colombia traditionally sees the highest levels of support for ties to the U.S. While Gaviria regularly took shots at Uribe, he usually did so in a non-threatening fashion. For example, when addressing Uribe's close ties to the U.S., Gaviria noted that three people (to include himself), not a mere two (namely Presidents Bush and Uribe), had a right to influence Colombia's destiny. Gaviria's criticism of our extradition relationship was similarly timid, stating that he supported extraditing individuals who commit crimes in the U.S., but only after they first served time in Colombia for any major crimes committed here.

ORGANIZED LABOR: DIVIDED AND GETTING SMALLER

¶ 15. (C) Colombia's three labor confederations represent just under five percent of the adult-age workforce. Confederation leadership is made up of a hodge-podge of left and center-left political actors. While the current leadership of the largest, the United Workers' Confederation (CUT), is pro-Liberal, much of its rank and file is Polo-oriented. To confuse matters further, the General Work Confederation head is a vice president of the Polo, while some of its members have strong pro-Liberal identities. Meanwhile, the Confederation of Colombian Workers (CTC) is officially Liberal. The confederations seldom speak with one voice (except for opposition to the FTA), and their degree of

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influence on public opinion is minimal.

LIBERALS: SERPA DEFEAT SOUNDS DEATH KNELL?

¶ 16. (C) Liberal party leaders, including former President and OAS SyG Cesar Gaviria, agonized over the left-leaning Serpa as nominee, lamenting to us that Serpa had taken the party away from its traditional moderate discourse, relying instead on a circle of "radical" advisors. Some commentators say the PLC will disappear from the political scene. But this is by no means certain (see Ref B). If anything, the defeat of Serpa will force the PLC to move more toward the center, as evinced by Cesar Gaviria reaching out to Uribe just after May ¶ 128.

THE POLO: ALL ROADS LEAD TO LUCHO?

¶ 17. (C) Ideologically, Carlos Gaviria is very close to the far left end of the Colombian political spectrum. However, he is neither aggressive nor bombastic. While he appears to be in the same ideological camp as Polo Representative (and Senator-elect) Gustavo Petro, the two are night and day in style and tactics. While Petro organizes regular debates, grandstanding and criticizing the GOC on several fronts, Gaviria regularly refers to the importance of the rule of law and the sanctity of the 1991 Constitution. Petro cultivates public linkages to BRV President Chavez and Gaviria steers clear. While Gaviria (like Serpa) has wavered on labeling the FARC as a terrorist group, instead saying the FARC commits terrorist acts, he has rejected the FARC's stated goal of taking power in Colombia. Prior to May 28, Gaviria repeatedly told us that this was his first and only Presidential foray. However, in a meeting with poloffs on May 28, he smirked when his adult age son said, "Dad, you'll probably need to reconsider that position."

¶ 18. (C) Petro is a Chavez sympathizer and commands

considerable support in the Polo, but he is far from dominant in the party. Even when radical Liberal Party members such as Senator-elect Piedad Cordoba are counted, the pro-Chavez faction of the left is more adept at making noise than at influencing events. Few doubt that Petro is ambitious and would like to unite the left behind him, but no informed opinion considers his task easy or likely to succeed. Bogota Mayor Luis Eduardo "Lucho" Garzon's private secretary told poloff on May 31 that Petro was strongly considering running for Bogota mayor in 2007. Were Petro to win (by no means guaranteed), he would in practical terms be excluded from running for President in 2010.

¶9. (C) Two camps exist to the "right" of Gaviria and Petro within the Polo, one apparently led by Senator and former M-19 guerrilla Antonio Navarro Wolff (who finished second to Gaviria in the Polo primary) and the other headed by Garzon, who legally could not run for President this time. Despite his organized labor background (a former head of the CUT), Garzon has been a model of moderation in his nearly three years running the capital, and competes with Uribe in terms of high public approval ratings. Among leaders of the left, Garzon is alone with high approval ratings and low negatives (Navarro Wolff and Petro show sizable negative impression numbers). He has also openly fought with Polo leaders over the direction of the party, including in the days immediately following Uribe's electoral win. His private secretary told us that Garzon has few direct dealings with Polo party leadership (other than party head and Senator Samuel Moreno) and finds it difficult to work with Polo members of the city council, who regularly vote against the mayor. Garzon has received accolades from the right, including President Uribe himself. For this reason, Garzon has engendered disdain from the Polo's more radical elements.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) Horacio Serpa's all but certain political death means the PLC will likely move closer to the center, leaving Rafael Pardo, Rodrigo Rivera, and those behind them to lead in the future. As such, internally divided Polo is now the only major leftist force in Colombia. While 22 percent was respectable for a candidate who was initially discounted, the result pales by comparison to Uribe's 62 percent. The moderate Lucho Garzon will continue to be the leading

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left-of-center option for 2010, albeit surrounded by the motley crew of his own party, several of whom consider him a sell-out to the right. In addition to completing a successful period as Bogota mayor, Garzon will have to distance himself from the Polo's radical elements to have a chance in the 2010 contest.

DRUCKER